MEMO
Date: Dec. 23, 20--
To: (Primary audience)
From: (Author)
CC: (Secondary Audiences)
RE: Educational Funding in New York State

Overview of the Problem
Nearly three million children attend New York State public schools, however these children do not all receive the same quality of education, or have access to the same resources. Because of inequalities in the way public schools are funded in New York, children in the public schools do not all have the same chance to succeed.

Causes of the Problem
Property Taxes: Approximately 54 percent of school funds are raised from local revenues, including a large part from property taxes (New York), however, property values vary greatly among neighborhoods (Koch). Schools in neighborhoods with low property values receive less money from their communities, thus creating a gap between what school districts in affluent and poor neighborhoods are able to provide for students.

State Funding Formulas: The formula New York State uses to distribute funds among public schools in the state does not take into account the differing needs of each district. For instance, New York City schools have a larger percentage of disabled students and English Language Learners than any other district in the state, yet these schools do not receive additional funding (New York).

Effect of the Problem
Low Student Achievement: According to a report about the educational status of New York State’s school districts, there are major differences in student achievement between poor school districts, especially New York City, and the more advantaged school districts, mostly suburban schools. In 2000, only 42 percent of New York City public school students, in comparison with 84 percent of students from more advantaged districts, met state standards in Language Arts at the elementary level. Also, only 26 percent of New York City students earned a Regents Diploma, as compared to 65 percent of students from advantaged school districts (New York).

Proposed Solutions (Nationwide)
School Vouchers: School vouchers, which provide money for parents to send their children to private schools, have been put into place in some states. Opponents to school vouchers, such as the New York State United Teachers organization, claim that vouchers do not help the poorest students and serve to further weaken public schools (“Statement by New York State United Teachers”).

The “Robin Hood” Approach: This policy, which is very controversial in some states, such as Vermont, takes money from the richest districts and gives it to the poorest districts (Koch).
Quality, Not Money: Some experts believe that giving more money to public schools will not necessarily improve the schools. Eric Hanushek, a professor of economics and political science at the University of Rochester, holds such a view. “We’re pouring huge amounts of money into education,” Hanushek said, “and we’re not getting anything out of it” (Walters).

Next Steps
The debate on how to fund New York State’s public schools is not one that will be easily resolved. A struggling economy and diverse views on how to improve the schools stand as barriers to progress on this issue. New ideas constantly need to be examined. One solution that is worth pursuing is the idea of taxing everyone in New York State at the same rate, then pooling that money and dividing it equally among school districts. This would eliminate the funding inequalities that result from raising revenue from local property taxes. However, this plan would draw criticism from the more affluent communities, who may not feel an obligation to help fund poorer districts.

Works Cited